

Oral Statement of SSG John Daniel Shannon

March 5, 2007

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify today on issues at Walter Reed Medical Center. My name is SSG John Daniel Shannon. What has brought me to speak is my personal ethic as a professional soldier. I will not see young men and women who have had their lives shattered in service to their country receive anything less than dignity and respect.

I was wounded while serving in Iraq with the 1st Battalion 503 infantry regiment. We were conducting operations out of Habiniyah, Iraq, and had been moved to "Combat Outpost," a small compound on the Southeast side of Ramadi. On November 13, 2004, I suffered a gunshot wound to the head from an AK-47 during a firefight with insurgent forces near Saddam's Mosque. The result of that wound was, primarily, a traumatic brain injury and the loss of my left eye.

I arrived at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center's Ward 58 on or about the 16th of November, 2004. I was discharged in outpatient status on approximately the 18th of November, 2004. Upon my discharge hospital staff gave me a photocopied map of the installation and told to go to the Mologne House, where I would live while an outpatient. I was extremely disoriented and wandered around while looking for someone to direct me to the Mologne House. Eventually I found it.

I had been given a couple of weeks of appointments and some other paperwork upon leaving Ward 58, and I went to all of my appointments during that time. After these appointments, I sat in my room for another couple of weeks wondering when someone would contact me about continuing my medical care. Finally, I went through the paperwork I was given and started calling all the phone numbers until I reached my case manager, who promptly got me the appointments I needed. I soon made contact with the Medical Holding Company. At that time I was in-processed and assigned to the 2nd Platoon, Med Hold Company.

I was informed that my Medical Evaluation Board/Physical Evaluation Board (MEB/PEB) would not proceed until my face was put back together. This process is important to me because the result of the evaluation determines the percentage of my disability. During the time my injuries were being fixed, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms started surfacing. I was informed that my MEB process would not proceed until the PTSD was medicinally controlled. Months later, I was informed that my MEB had to be restarted because my information had been lost. I began meeting with my new physical evaluation counselor, Mr. Giess, in late January and early February. He informed that my MEB needed to be stopped again until the plastic surgery and ocular prosthetic procedures were finished. Therefore, two years after first being admitted to Walter Reed, I am hearing the same thing about the MEB/PEB process that I heard when I first began it two years ago.

I want to leave this place. I've seen so many soldiers get so frustrated with the process that they will sign anything presented them just so they can get on with their lives. We have almost no advocacy that is not working for the government. No one that we can talk to about this process, who is knowledgeable and we can trust, is going to give us fair treatment and informed guidance. My physical evaluation counselor and the MEB/PEB both work for the government and have its interests, not our interests, in mind.

Danny Soto, who works in the Molongie House as an independent advocate for those of us going through the process, is priceless in the assistance he provides. But he is only one man. The system can't be trusted and soldiers get less than they deserve from a system seemingly designed and run to cut costs associated with fighting this war. The truly sad thing is that surviving veterans from every war we've ever fought can tell the same, basic story—a story about neglect, lack of advocacy, and frustration with the military bureaucracy.

Thank you again for allowing me to the opportunity to share my experiences with this Committee.